WHIRRAKEE

March 2001 Vol. 22 No. 2

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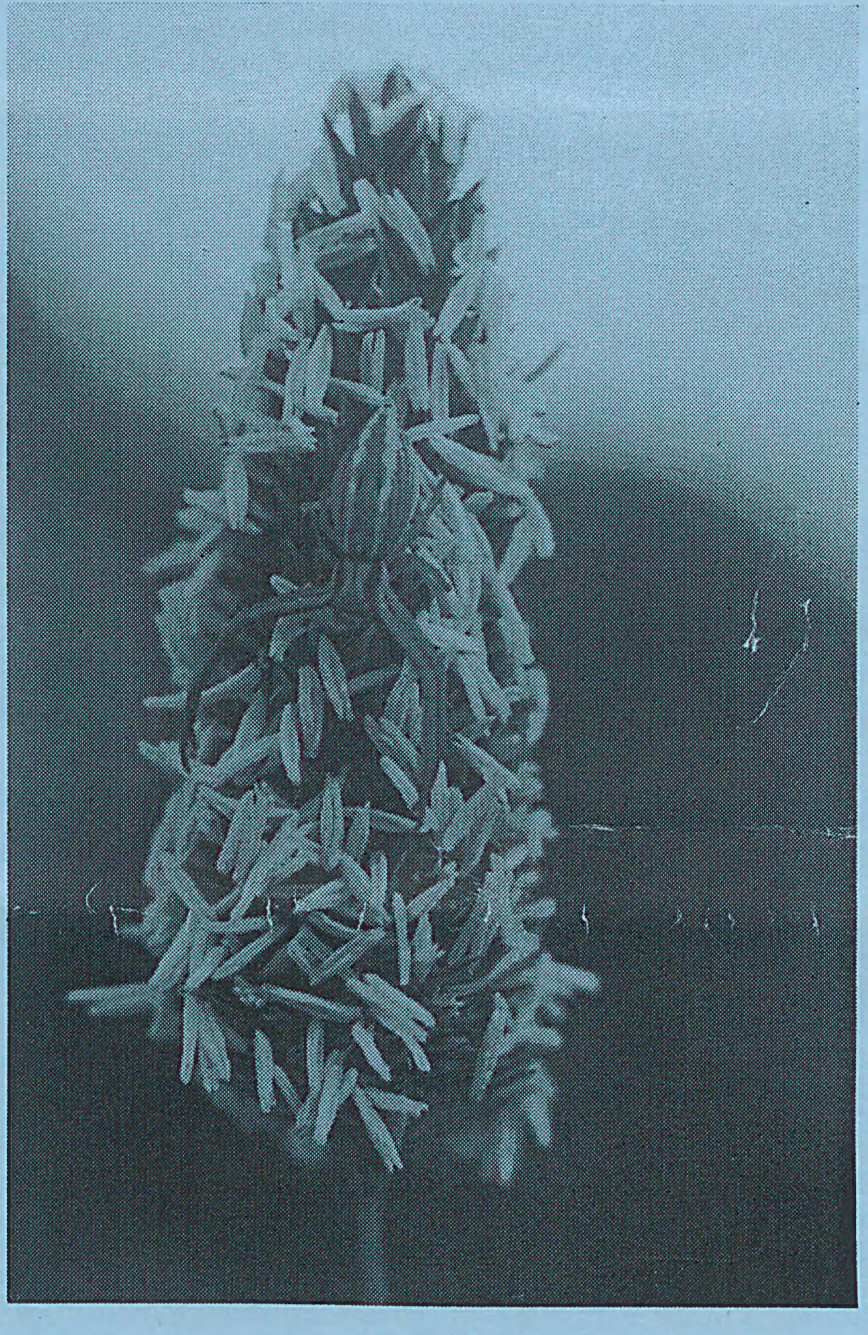

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552

Office Bearers for 2000 - 2001

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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34. These rates include GST.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. Meetings start at 7:30pm and conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers listed above, together with the following members: Darren Green; Maurie Lewis; Kate Lottkowitz; Phil Robertson; Bob Ruddick

Excursions The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Full-day excursions normally commence at 10am (usually on a Sunday); half-day excursions normally commence at 2pm and may be either on a Saturday or Sunday. Full-day or half-day excursions are usually held on the weekend following the General Meeting. Campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active sub-group:

Mammal Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Front Cover: Photographer: Ian Flecknoe-Brown

I showed this photo to Jenny Shield who was, at the time, nearly drowing under a pile of spider slides for the 'Spiders of Bendigo' book. It looked very promising! She identified the name and the sex of this spider sitting on a flowering grass as *Runcinia acuminata* (female). The spider is in the family Thomisidae, and is commonly called a crab spider. R. Mascord (1991) in Australian Spiders in colour (Reed Books) writes that these spiders are commonly found in grass-seeding heads and low herbage. This is also where the egg sac is built. The male of the species is much smaller in the body but its legs are about the same length as those of the female. They feed on small insects which visit the grass heads, predominantly small moths, but they do not use a web as snare.

I hesitate to identify the grass but might be a bit more confident after this month's grass identification workshop (see back page)

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 22, No. 2, March 2001

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editors' Note
If you happen to have studied the inside front cover of this edition, you would have noticed that our president, Barbara Chmielewska has reverted to her original surname (this will be a relief to some people who always found the pronunciation so very hard). The interesting thing is that this (polish) surname indicates that the bearer is female, by ending in -a. Also, while still on the inside front cover, you my have noticed that the Bird Observers Group has gone officially into dormancy. This is not a permanent state. If it concerns you, watch out for the notice that will call for its revival in the near future. The Mammal Study Group is certainly making up in terms of current and future activities. Thank you to Maurie Lewis for being so inspired.

A Bit about WRIN

Author: Brenda Cheers
Maryborough Wildlife Shelter

The Wildlife Rescue and Information Network, Inc. (WRIN) is made up of wildlife shelter operators, some of their carers and volunteers; no member of WRIN (or any wildlife shelter operator) receives any funding. We are all volunteers, not paid rangers as some people seem to think. WRIN operates a 24 hr wildlife help mobile phone line, costs for running the phone can be high and is paid for out of the subs of members. We are in need of more members as well as volunteers, who, after some instruction and practical experience with an experienced member, will be called on to pick-up or rescue a bird/animal and transport it wither to a shelter or a vet.

Last year (2000) the WRIN phone directly received 1038 calls for assistance. Most of these calls were for wildlife, but it was pleasing to note that some calls were from people who simply wanted information on some of our unique species. These calls are particularly rewarding as we are finding that there are people who are now prepared to go some way toward altering their lifestyle to accept that wildlife is part of it, e.g. protecting plants by erecting suitable fences or blocking entrance holes in roofs, rather than demanding to know how to get rid of animal – or 'can I shoot it'.

Several of our rescuers also received a high number of calls direct. This is because callers who are phoning for a second or third time often ring the number they were originally given rather than our mobile number. Mostly this works ok but it is preferable that the WRIN number – 0419 356 433 – is always used as our coordinator is aware when volunteers may not be available. Our total number of calls for assistance was therefore much higher, there's little doubt that our members perform a valuable and vital service to Bendigo and surrounding area, and not always under pleasant circumstances, I might add.

If any member of the Bendigo Field Nats would like any further information on WRIN – or wildlife – they can call our number 0419 356 433 anytime, although please try to keep it to a reasonable hour. Gary, our coordinator still relates the 1.30am call from a nurse on night duty who wanted some information on snakes. She explained that she had nothing to do at the time so thought she'd ring!!! Despite the time, Gary politely answered all the questions but requested that any further calls for information be at a more suitable hour for him.

Editors' note:
Readers may have noticed the small item on WRIN in almost every issue of Whirrakee (usually on or near the back page). But - did you notice that the phone number was wrong in the last issue? We would have perpetuated this mistake if Brenda Cheers had not spotted it! Thanks very much.
Please also note that Gary Cheers will be talking about WRIN in our October general meeting

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BFNC Excursion Plans for 2001

Maurie Lewis has become the excursion organiser for 2001 and, as a result, the list of planned excursions is very long...a tribute to Maurie's enthusiasm!

If you want to contribute to this list or have any other ideas, please ring Maurie on 0407 427179.

Plans for this year include:

Trip tp look at Grey-crowned Babblers at Lake Eppalock (will include a BBQ lunch)

Trip to Spargo Creek to see Greater Gliders and do some spotlighting at night (BBQ lunch and tea).

Trip to Wellsford Forest to look at birds in Spring (BBQ lunch).

Trip to look at Tuans (Brush-tailed Phascogales) in boxes in the Wellsford Forest (BBQ lunch).

Trip to look at White browed Babblers in Spring Gully (BBQ lunch)

Trip to Mt Alexander looking at frogs and the whip snake. Leader: Darren Green.

Trip to check nest boxes in Spring Gully from 9.45 to 1.00pm for about 8 weeks, probably in May.

For the annual bat counting at Lake Weeroona, **28th March**, see page 10 for details.

A Battle of Living Roots and Salinity

Author: Alf Howe

Late 1951, we went onto a 175 acre farm which still had areas of wind-swept land after the drought of 1937–38, 40–41 and 1943 to June 1945. A Bendigo rainfall chart will also show those years. What land that wasn't wind-swept and prone to salinity carried mostly saffron thistles. However, a red-legged earth mite plague wiped out the saffron thistles in 2 or 3 years.
The 22nd of March 1945 was the last day of the total blackout dust storms. A four hectare paddock at the front was badly wind-swept. We bought and planted out 100 Dwarf sugar gums, they all died. We tried pepper tree seedlings, they all died bar one which was only 2 metres high 40 years later. Of cuttings for a boobialla hedge, only one survived, tried privet and it died, tried poplars along a water drain, all died, this happened over several years.
Then we saw an advert in the Weekly Times for athel tree cuttings (*Tamarix ramosissima*) and 95% of these struck.
We tried unsuccessfully to grow oats and barley. Then we noticed that Wimmera rye grass seemed to be fairly salt resistant and any ground that was bare, I ridged with the 6 inch points on the combine drill. We mixed up a mixture of Wimmera rye grass seeds, superphosphate and a few handfuls of Palestine strawberry seeds and put them out with a broadcaster on the Fergy tractor. We had a wet winter and the seeds grew in the little gutters left by the combine. We fenced off the worst affected part from the stock. Over the years it returned to a good cover of grass including native wallaby grass, several gold dust wattles and two cassinia bushes. The seeds must have lain dormant for years.

Growing a garden.....after the athel trees had started to lower the water table, we were able to grow grey-leaved plants, blue-flowering plants lobelia and violets, yarrow, mirrorbush and succulents. After growing giant pigface for several years we would find worms working the soil. Agapanthus, couchgrass and kikuyu survived. Worms worked in the paspalum plants during the winter. The same happens with Juncus (ordinary rush) when they are slashed.
Looking back now, I realise some of the deep-rooted summer weeds like hogweed, fat hen and another creeping weed with a grey leaf like fat hen would grow in bare salty ground.

We were able to grow lucerne on the better soil. I think there could be a use fo creeping salt weed with its little red salt-tasting berries and *Acacia salicinia* (willow wattle or Cooba). Golddust wattle has come up where nothing has grown for 50 years. *Bursaria spinosa*, when it grew in our district was a home for small nesting birds like wrens, thornbills and finches.
As the water table dropped around the farm yard, we grew *Melaleuca incana*, grey honey myrtle along with *M. linearifolia*, snow-in-summer, *M. styphilioides*, prickly paperbark and *M. armillaris*, bracelet honey myrtle.

Other notes that could explain some of the salt problems generally: In 1973-74-75, Bendigo district received 104 inches of rain. During that time, trees, whether on irrigation or dry country, suffered. A lot of lowland was affected that didn't normally have water lying on it. Whole areas died because trees don't like warm water lying around them for any lengths of time.
For example, the eastern side of Pompapiel recreation reserve was under water for months during the summers. The trees all died. The salinity showed up later, the area now carries salt bush.
I recently went up to Pyramid Hill, 25 years after the devastation of the early seventies. Grass is growing where it hasn't grown for years. All the way from Campbell's Forest onwards especially the Pompapiel Creek, the last few kilometres before it joins the Bullock Creek, the big old blackbox trees are looking their best for twenty five years or more. One of the reasons, I think, is that 1996 was really the last wet year we had, since then we have had dry years. Summer thunderstorm rains build up the rainfall average, but it doesn't soak in and most of it runs off into dams and storages.
Bendigo lawns would save a lot of water if drought resistant plants like lippia and dicondra were grown. Trees alone won't reverse salinity. Deep-rooted grasses and understorey shrubs will help with proper use of water needed for sustainability.
Red bead bush is the first plant to show up on bare saline soil after rain. Are the seeds already in the ground?...because we are a long way from the coast.
Another note: we only had 29 acre feet of water when we went onto the farm. After Eildon was completed, we received 163 Megalitres under the 1964 formula. With careful use of water, the farm had almost 175 acres of A class soils less 20 square metres when we retired.

Without living roots, salinity won't be fixed up. Willow wattles grow on a wide range of soils. Low-growing ground cover is very important in keeping the sun from beaming down directly onto bare ground. If the water table is 1.7 metres from the surface, the sun draws moisture leaving the salt on the surface.

Decoy Behaviour in Superb Fairy-wrens

Author: Peter Howden

Having observed many (hundreds of?) Superb Fairy-wrens (*Malurus cyaneus*) in the past, I was rather surprised by the behaviour of a particular bird near Arakoon.

Walking around the edge of the lake at Arakoon, I approached some low Gold Dust Wattle (*Acacia acinacea*) bushes, in which I could hear the call of Fairy-wrens. A female wren suddenly scuttled (?) out of the acacia and into scrub on the other side of the path. The bird had its tail down and its rump (back?) feathers fluffed up. It looked a bit like a mouse. Not sure of my observation, I followed the bird down and embankment. It continued its tail down, fluffed up, behaviour as it hopped through the scrub. It did not fly until I got too close (and perhaps far enough away from its young).

Retracing my steps on my walk soon after, I passed by the same acacia and the bird repeated this behaviour. This time I did not follow it, so it stopped, adopted the usual tail up posture and called loudly to get my attention.

Have others observed this behaviour before? It was a first for me!

Editors' note: I got this article more than a year ago but lost it! When I recently asked Peter which month the observation was made, (understandably) he could not quite remember but thought it was probably December.

From the Mailbag

Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

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THE BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
February 2001

"Birds of the Kimberley" by Tom Grove describes two weeks travel from Kununurra to Broome, visiting the fine natural history sites and seeing a "fantastic" number of birds.

"Bird Routes of the Dubbo District" by Janis Hosking provides a guide to good birding locations in this area of New South Wales.

"Wildlife Watching in Far North Queensland" by Nicolas Day reports on two weeks spent around Cairns. More than 250 species of birds were seen in a variety of habitats, as well as other wildlife.

- Spectacular Orchids: BOCA camp at Cavendish
- The Mallee Dam: west of Nhill
- Urban Cattle Egrets: observations at Werribee
- White Butcherbirds: near Bundaberg, Qld.
- Nesting Raptors: at Willis, East Gippsland
- Birding Buckley Hole: on Bribie Island, Qld.

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Also received recently:

*Castlemaine Naturalist(CFNC)
February 2001

*Geelong Naturalist(GFNC)
February 2001

*Newsletter(Ballarat FNC)
February 2001

*Field Nats News(FNCV)
Jan/Feb 2001

*Sun-Nat(Sunraysia FNC)
February-March 2001

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North Queensland Odyssey

Author: Tom Burton

Those who know me know that for some years I have been a laboratory biologist, rarely venturing into the field, my one surviving virtue being that I don't wear a white coat. However, when the chance came for me to join an expedition into North Queensland to find a 'new' frog, I jumped at it.

A couple of years ago, some colleagues, Marg Davies from the University of Adelaide, Keith McDonald from Queensland Parks and Wildlife, and Graeme Watson, then at the University of Melbourne (now retired), discovered a frog very similar to *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis,* our common grass frog, in the grassy swampland close to Karumba, 72 km north of Normanton, on the Gulf of Carpentaria.

They managed to catch four individuals, enough for a description of this probable new species, but not enough to study variation or to spare specimens for the internal investigation to be able to see how it fits with the other *tas*-like frogs.

In Graeme's absence, I was invited to join Marg and Keith in a second expedition to find the frog again, and collect at least three more specimens. Both Marg and Keith are enormously experienced at frog hunting in the Australian tropics, and this was a marvellous opportunity for me.

Thus it was that in mid-January 2001, I flew to Cairns, meeting Marg in Sydney. In Cairns we were met by Keith, and driven to Keith's home in Atherton in a Land Cruiser soon laden with boxes for food and equipment, and an insulated box designed for carrying live frogs, as well as our luggage.

Next day, Marg and I were sworn in as Volunteers in the QPWS Nature Search. Our goals as intrepid Volunteers were to find and collect the 'new' frog, and to assist Keith in the quest to map the species distributions of frogs and flora and fauna in general. Marg had some additional goals—to collect a diverse array of insects for practical classes, and to collect some Spadefoot Toads for breeding purposes.

My secret goal (I was more trepid than intrepid) was to avoid crocodiles. 'If you catch red eye-shine with your headlamp, and the eyes stay visible, don't worry, it's a young-un. But if you catch an eye-shine, and the eyes disappear below the water, get out of there.' Having given me this advice, Keith then gave me the statistics on the smallest croc known to have killed a child, and the smallest to have killed an adult human ... just what I wanted to know.

Georgetown

We set off through the verdant mountain country near Atherton, on our journey to the Gulf. First stop was Georgetown, half way between Cairns and the Gulf, where we were to stop for a survey of the frogs between Georgetown and Forsayth, 40 km to the south, where frogs had not been surveyed previously. We settled into our motel (where in a tree, both Apostle-birds and Magpie Larks were sitting on mud nests), then, when darkness, approached, we hit the road.

Very soon after leaving Georgetown, I spotted, on the ground, a cuckoo-shrike I had seen only in books. 'What's that? On the ground?' 'What?' 'Some cuckoo-shrike.' Sudden slamming of brakes ... the first of many times Keith stopped the Land Cruiser in his excitement. We backed up, and there, looking like its picture in every bird book, was a Ground Cuckoo-shrike, right at the northern extremity of its range.

This was an auspicious start. The road took us through rolling, lush open eucalypt parkland (trees about 10m tall) with granite outcrops and myriad conical termite mounds. We reached Forsayth in the dark, and waited for a while to give the frogs a chance to start calling. Then the Cruiser was turned north, and we drove slowly back to Georgetown, listening for frog calls, and stopping at every creek bed or likely roadside puddle to look for frogs that were just sitting silently.

The weather had been hot and humid, and that night we were treated to an amazing thunder and lightning display in the sky to our north. Northern Australia is one of the lightning capitals of the world, and the lightning strikes we saw in the distance that night was repeated nightly during our trip. (Meanwhile, a storm was brewing back in Atherton that night, and 26 000 lightning flashes were recorded.)

While we were emu-parading along sandy, puddly creek beds near Forsayth, and finding only the Ornate Burrowing Frog *Limnodynastes ornatus,* unknown to us the storm we had admired was dumping 30 mm of rain on and around Georgetown. So as we made our way slowly northwards, rain was bringing the frogs to life. As we worked our way along the road, the frog choruses became louder and more diverse.

We caught and identified twelve species that night. Marg and Keith knew the calls so well that capture was not essential to the survey, any more than sighting is necessary during a bird survey when a well-known bird calls, but just as it is better to see the bird and verify it, so it is with surveying frogs. At each location, Keith pulled out his GPS device and portable tape recorder, and dictated the latitude and longitude and the species of frogs that had been identified.

Our catching methods varied. Keith is a frog-catcher extraordinaire, and often he wandered off and returned with plastic bags with two or three species in them. Because Marg was immobilised by foot problems, I was Keith's only helper, and if I were to be of any use, lacking Keith's experience, I had to rely on sticking with Keith, and locating frogs by triangulation.

Triangulation requires two people with headlamps. When a calling frog is located, each person turns his/her headlamp onto the line s/he thinks the sound is coming from. Where the two beams cross, there should be the frog. Then the two people advance towards that spot until the frog stops calling. The lamps are turned off, and then you wait until the frog calls again, turn on the lamps again, advance again. Eventually, both people are standing directly above the calling frog, and somebody spots it and catches it.

The frogs included three 'ground hylids', members of the tree-frog family Hylidae that have moved into a new niche, and never go near a tree. Two of these, the Pale Frog *Litoria pallida* and Peters' Frog *L. inermis,* are so common as to be thought of as weeds, but the third, the Buzzing Tree Frog *L. electrica* is relatively rare. It derives its peculiar name from its mating call, which sounds like a buzzing electrical appliance.

Some hylids have moved into a very different niche, and they avoid desiccation by burrowing. A few of these burrowers were out in the ponds calling, including the Short-footed Frog *Cyclorana brevipes,* the New Holland Frog *C. novae-hollandiae,* and the Small Frog *C. manya.* The last of these is a small burrowing species with a sheep-bleat of a call. It was discovered and named some years ago by Keith.

We returned to our motel by about 1 a.m.. Early next morning, Keith and I went in search of a rare ironbark eucalypt and a 'new' plant in the tobacco-potato-tomato family Solanaceae that he thought he had seen when driving down to Forsayth. While Keith botanised, I looked for birds. Best birds were a flock of Plumed Whistling Duck. Keith had already transcribed his dictated notes from the night before onto paper and into his laptop.

Normanton

After breakfast, we set off to Normanton through more open forest. The Wet had come early this season, and Normanton had been in the news a few weeks before, because it had been cut off by flooding and that food had had to be dropped in. We found out later that beer supplies had to be brought by boat across the swollen Norman River.

We booked into an air-conditioned motel. This is the usual routine for my colleagues. The daily program is as follows: work at night, between late afternoon and maybe 1 or 2 a.m.; sleep until 7 or 8 a.m.; brekky (muesli); the morning spent fixing up things from the previous night: photographing the frogs that were caught, killing those that had to go to a museum, and laying them out on a tray full of 65% alcohol in a good posture to allow further study and measurement for the next few hundred years; transcription of taped field notes from the previous night, setting up the aerator for the tadpoles, etc.; perhaps a fast recce of sites for the next night's work; midday dinner in the motel dining room; siesta or reading after lunch; off to the collecting area late afternoon; a light meal, consisting of vita-weat 'sandwiches', fruit and water; then off collecting. We occupied two rooms in each motel. One had the food, the other the frogs and associated paraphernalia, and smelt somewhat of alcohol.

Because of the early Wet, we expected that most frogs had long ago bred and that some had

already stopped calling for the season. Thus there was a palpable tension in the air when we set off for Karumba on that first night. Had the 'new' grass-frog finished calling for the year?

For the first 40 or so kilometres, the road passed through lush, grassy open eucalypt and melaleuca forest, but closer to Karumba the trees gave out, and a large, flat, grassy wetland took over. The bird life we saw as we zoomed past on our way to Karumba Point was wonderful: Brolgas, Sarus Cranes, Jabirus, Bustards, Pied Herons by the score, three species of egret in large numbers, Sacred Ibis, Magpie Geese, Wedge-tails—and that is only counting big birds we could see easily.

At Karumba, we sat with the car, eating our biscuits, and watched the sun set over the Gulf—very spectacular. Then we drove back along the Normanton road, listening intently for the new frog, and ... nothing. The only frog calling was the Marbled Frog *Limnodynastes convexiusculus,* a jaw-breaker of a name. When McLeay named this frog *'convexiusculus'* one day in 1877, he must have been in an antisocial mood. In the distance, the storms raged, and lightning rent the sky, but there was no rain for us this night, and we returned to our motel worried about whether the trip had been a waste of time and money.

Next morning, Keith and I checked out another site along the road to Burketown. There was plenty of water on the road, and lots of grassy puddles on the road's edge, so it looked promising, but when we went there that night, only a few frogs were calling—Cane Toads among them, of course—and we remained disconsolate. However, that night rain fell, right across from Normanton to Karumba, and next day we were full of hope.

So, on our third night in Normanton, we headed off to Karumba again. After a less spectacular sunset at Karumba Point, we pointed the car towards Normanton, and hoped ... We didn't have long to wait. As soon as the car reached the outskirts of Karumba, we started hearing the grass-frog's call—very similar to that of our local Spotted Grass Frog *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis.*

Keith and I piled out of the car. We triangulated upon a grassy clump in ankle deep water by the roadside, and Keith soon spotted the first frog in his headlamp. 'There he is! I'll just move this blade of grass ... Damn!' This happened several times. Whenever these frogs detected the subtlest of movements, they were off. Eventually, I gave my only wise piece of advice of the trip: 'When you see it, Keith, don't tell me about it—just grab it!'

This worked! Next frog Keith saw, he dived, grabbed the frog and a handful of grass at the same time. Keith plunged his clenched fist into the plastic bag I held open for him, then I closed the bag over his arm. He opened his hand, liberating grass and frog, and withdrew his hand while I maintained a seal, so that the frog could not follow his hand out of the bag. Then Keith located the frog in the bag, and held it in a corner, while I fished out the grass. Then I tied the bag, and took it triumphantly to Marg to put into the insulated box. We caught seven frogs in this way (even I was successful), enough to justify the whole trip.

These were very hard frogs to find because of the density of the grass and their quick reaction to the slightest disturbance, so catching these seven frogs took some hours, hours that passed rapidly because we were so focused and having so much fun.

On the way home from the collecting spot, Keith drove slowly, while we listened for the calls. The new frog was heard almost continuously for nearly 30 km (apart from a salty area with no frogs for 5 km), that is, the entire length of the treeless plain. We are confident then that the population of these frogs is large and healthy.

So what is this frog like? It is like a small Spotted Grass Frog, really. It is pale green-grey on the back with darker mottling, uniformly pale underneath, and the calling males have yellow throats. We may yet decide that it is just an isolated population of Grass Frogs when we have all the information we can get from studies of its anatomy and analysis of its call, but the current betting is that we shall decide that it is new.

Next morning was given over to photographing the animal. Some of them were killed in choral hydrate, and fixed for museum storage, others kept alive in case we accidentally found a female. Females don't call, so any capture of a female is due to a chance encounter rather than skilful techniques.

One prize from the previous night was a clump of spawn almost certainly belonging to the new species (they were in a foam nest, and the tadpoles are not those of the Marbled Frog, the only other foam-nester around). One of the jobs was to set up an aerator to keep the eggs, and very soon tadpoles were swimming happily. The fact that the tadpoles are very different from those of the Spotted Grass Frog is one reason we suspect that the species is 'new'. Now we have to wait until the tadpoles metamorphize to be sure.

Next night—no further rain having fallen—we went back to Karumba, drove the transect again, and ... not a sound from the new frog. We had just been very lucky the previous night. Lack of frogs did not mean that we had an early night. Marg had insects to collect for taxonomy classes back in Adelaide, so she laid an ultra-violet fluoro tube in a plastic sheath above a tray full of 75% alcohol, and in ten minutes caught tens of thousands of insects, mostly beetles.

Mike Tyler at Adelaide Uni wanted some live northern Spadefoot Toad *Notaden melanoscaphus* for a project he is working on, so we looked for, found, and caught some of them for the frog box, but these activities were anti-climactic after the success of the previous night.

Next day we returned to Atherton, mission complete. Further excitement was in store: Sunbirds, Brush Turkeys and Wandering Whistling Ducks at Lake Barrine, *Cophixalus ornatus*, a microhylid frog (my special frog family), but these were just bonuses. Marg and I were content to leave the humid north for the even worse south (what an atrocious summer it has been!), knowing that we had done and seen what we came to do and see, and a lot more besides.

Lists of Animals seen between Georgetown and Karumba.

Frogs

Cyclorana brevipes. C.novae-hollandiae, C. manya, Litoria alboguttata, L. caerulea, L. rubella, L. rothi, L. pallida, L. electrica, L. inermis, Crinia deserticola, Limnodynastes convexiusculus, L. ornatus, Notaden melanoscaphus, Uperoleia lithomoda, Bufo marinus.

Reptiles

Spotted Python, Water Python, *Varanus panoptes, V. tristis.*

Mammals

Agile Wallaby, Northern Nail-tailed Wallaby, Antelopine Wallaroo, Wallaroo, Red Kangaroo, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, (Red-legged Pademelon near Atherton), feral cat (three), feral pig (three)

Birds

Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Black Cormorant, Pelican, Jabiru, Brolga, Sarus Crane, Great Egret, Intermediate Egret, Little Egret, White-faced Heron, Pied Heron, Sacred Ibis, Magpie Goose, Plumed Whistling Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Little Eagle, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Black Kite, Whistling Kite, Kestrel, Brown Falcon, Australian Bustard, Brown Quail, Masked Lapwing, Black-fronted Dotterel, Greenshank, Crested Pigeon, Common Bronzewing, Peaceful Dove, Bar-shouldered Dove, Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, Little Corella, Galah, Rainbow Lorikeet, Varied Lorikeet, Pale-headed Rosella, Pheasant Coucal, Koel, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Rainbow Bee-eater, Dollarbird, Barn Owl, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Ground Cuckoo-shrike, Restless Flycatcher, Willie Wagtail, Golden-headed Cisticola, Red-backed Fairy-wren, White-throated Warbler, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Rufous-throated Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, Crimson Finch, Zebra Finch, House Sparrow, Apostlebird, Magpie Lark, Black-faced Woodswallow, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Great Bowerbird, Australian Raven, Torresian Crow.

Notable birds between Georgetown and Atherton

Yellow Sunbird, Brush Turkey, Wandering Whistling Duck, , Red-winged Parrot, Indian Myna,

A Bear Story

(This story was written by Thirza E. Young about an event that occurred in Central Queensland in 1926.)

This is a true bear story. It is not about a brown bear, nor a polar bear. It is about a little Australian animal called a native bear or Koala.

This animal, a little bigger than a domestic cat and of a heavier build, lives in the trees and its food is principally the young leaves of the gum tree and iron-bark. However they eat the leaves of other eucalypts.

They are curious looking animals with their short heads, round ears and innocent faces. They have only an apology for a tail and most of them no tail at all is apparent. Their thick fur is white and brown and brownish grey. When on the ground and moving from tree to tree they go with a bound.

On the hind parts the skin is thick and the fur short and thick, where they sit on the tree forks.

Their usual noise is something like a snore but they can cry like a child and often make shrill screams like a woman in distress. .

Strangers to the bush have been known to jump up and rush out in the night thinking a woman is being murdered. Imagine their relief to find out it was only an old man bear, screaming defence to a rival.

But for my story.

When we came to live in this house, it was closely surrounded by iron-bark trees. Native bears were plentiful.

During the mating season (October to November) the bears make a good deal of noise.

I had got quite used to it but one night I heard one crying near the house. Later, in the moonlight I heard our dog yelping as if hurt. I jumped out of bed and ran outside.

At the foot of the tree I found our dog Ginger and a neighbour's dog Jock facing the old man bear. He had evidently given Ginger a scratch which set him yelping.

My appearance was a signal for them to attack the bear. I beat the dogs off with a stick, thinking, of course, that the bear would get up the tree, but instead he attacked the dogs.

He grabbed Jock round the neck with all four legs, dragging him to the ground gasping. Then I beat off the bear, who stood screaming with rage, and at once the dogs attacked. I beat them off again but the bear then attacked. I was fain to beat him off. He would not escape up the tree. So he was badly mauled and lay on the ground growling with rage while I held the dogs at bay.

After a time he crawled to another tree some distance away and slowly climbed up. I could not look but I think his mate must have escaped from the dogs up the first tree. It was to protect her that he stayed and fought the dogs. A native bear is quite harmless and usually quiet tempered. There was a very strong odour while the fight was in progress.

All the next day the bear stayed in the tree. I could see that he was badly bitten. When evening fell and the dogs safely out of the way he must have descended. I could hear two bears on the ground talking to each other about fifty yards away.

Next day there was no sign of our old warrior.

Article supplied by Jenny Shield. Thirza Young was a widow with three children living alone in the bush. Bondoola is about 10km west of Yepoon on the Central Queensland coast.

Mammal Study Group
Bat Counting at Lake Weeroona

28 March 2001 - Wednesday evening: The Mammal Study Group will be capturing bats at Lake Weeroona again this year as part of a long term study of bats in the Bendigo Region. The evening will start about 6:30 pm with a BBQ tea (BYO everything) at the picnic pavilion nearest the RR track. Mist nets will be placed around the pavilion. A short talk on the biology of the bats and the results of the project will be given while waiting for the bats which will start to come out at 7:50 pm. The bats will be weighed and measured before being released. Everyone is welcome, including children.

February general meeting - an interesting and mixed bag

Author: Sabine Wilkens

The first meeting of the year, the February meeting is usually a medley of holiday shots, project reports and plans for the new year. This tradition was upheld last month.

Maurie Lewis, the club's excursion officer told us about the numerous activities he has been involved in, partly in conjunction with the mammal study group and partly his own personal initiatives. Many of the excellent slides which accompanied his talk were of nest boxes and their inhabitants (sugar gliders or tuans or bees)
A group of keen people have been meeting every Friday and putting up nest boxes in the Spring Gully bushland. This activity is ongoing (see back page).
Maurie also reported on an excursion to Mt Alexander, led by Darren Green, to find the whipsnake. One of the slides, in which the snake was neatly curled up around a one dollar coin illustrated how tiny this animal is. It could easily be mistaken for a worm!
We also saw slides of some local flora, which the group had come across during their (mainly animal-oriented) trips.
Peter Ellis continued the floral theme, some local and from as far as Malacoota. The slide of the Common Heath deserved a prize!

Glenise Moors gave a report of her research project at Sedgwick. Glenise and Jan Orr are trying to work out the movements and feeding behaviour of Flame Robins over the winter months. Nobody really knows where these birds go at other times of the year but the high country is the most likely location. The colour banding project will hopefully help solve this interesting puzzle.
Glenise and Jan have managed to do 83 days of observing between April and September 2000. Of these traps were set on 53 days and the total trap hours amounted to 1373 hours.
So far 60 birds have been colour banded. Most birds banded last year were not seen again this year.
This is an incredibly labour-intensive project, and that over winter....Glenise and Jan are out there almost every second day, rain or shine...Glenise spoke of the birds as if they were old frineds. Some have footballer's names (!)
All the sightings are plotted on a gigantic chart which was demonstrated on the night. This seems very involved but it is probably the only way to work out any patterns in the robins' feeding and migratory behaviour.
I am hoping that Glenise will write a report on this amazing project for the *Whirrakee* one day!

Finally Jane Cleary reported on her latest Earthwatch expedition to Eilat in Israel.
Jan was involved in a project were she had to count raptors flying overhead near a small sanctuary in the Negev desert. The countryside looked magnificent, white and totally hostile to plant growth. Yet, some plants grew there. Many of these were plants mentioned in the bible, one of Jane's special interests.

The February meetings are always a surprise. Firstly, it is good to see many familiar (and also some new) faces after a long break and then we can catch up on what everybody has been doing (or intends to continue doing). Many members are very busy with their projects. There is plenty of opportunity for those new or old members who want to get more involved with the Club, either doing something different or joining into an existing activity. Contact the secretary if that applies to you.

The new *Emu*

Emu, Australia's premier ornithological journal, has been published for the last 100 years by Birds Australia (the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union) and has been edited most recently by Ian Rowley. With Ian's retirement as Editor, Birds Australia has signed an agreement appointing CSIRO PUBLISHING as the publisher of Emu. A new Editorial Advisory Committee has been appointed and the new Managing Editor is David Morton of CSIRO PUBLISHING. The Journal will be produced in both print and electronic formats.

***Emu* is now available online, with FREE trial access to all papers in Volume 100 (2000) until 1 May 2001.**

To find out more about the 'new' Emu, including the Editorial Advisory Committee, a listing of the papers currently accepted for publication, details

of how to subscribe, and further information for authors, or just to view the papers published in Volume 100, please visit the website at http://www.publish.csiro.au/journals/emu/
The first issue of Volume 101 will be published in March 2001.

A Name Change for Most Eriostemons

summarised from: australian plants online, September 2000, by Michael Bayly. (http://farrer.riv.csu.edu.au/ASGAP/APOL13/mar99-3.html

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Many members would be aware that the genus name for the local plant species Eriostemon verrucosus, *Bendigo Wax or Fairy Wax Flower changed last year to* Philotheca verrucosa. *In case you find these name changes hard to accept, here is an article that explains this particular one.*

Most of the familiar eriostemons (family Rutaceae) have recently undergone a formal name change. The new classification which will be adopted in the 'Flora of Australia', sees *Eriostemon* comprising just two species (*Eriostemon australasius* and *E. banksii*) and the remaining 30 species placed in the related genus *Philotheca.*
This new classification is the work of Paul Wilson, from the Western Australian Herbarium, who was responsible for the last major work on classification of *Eriostemon* (published in 1970), and who is preparing the account of this group for 'Flora of Australia'. The aim of this classification is to have a system that best reflects our understanding of the evolutionary relationships of these plants.
...for some time evidence has been mounting that, under the old classification, species placed in *Eriostemon* are not part of a single lineage, i.e. some specie are probably more closely related to members of other genera than they are to each other.
The two species that will remain in the genus *Eriostemon* (*E. australasius* and *E. banksii*) differ in many ways from the other species. They both have large flowers, flat and almost papery leaves and obscure oil glands (rather than prominent warts), petals with three main veins (rather than one), staminal filaments that are distinctly warty towards the apex, unusual star-like hairs on the leaves and petals and a different chromosome number.

Many of the remaining small-laves species appear closely related to the genus *Philotheca.* The genus has traditionally been distinguished from *Eriostemon* because its members have staminal filaments that are united into a tube for part of their length. It now seems, however, that placing the few species in a genus distinct from the small-leaved eriostemons is not well justified. The features that these two groups share include: leaves that are usually small, and often round in cross-section (and contain structural cells, called sclereids, of a very distinct form), hairy petals, strikingly similar seed morphology, staminal filaments that are erect when young but become recurved with age, and most notable, distinctive stipule-like glands that occur on either side of the leaf bases.

Given these facts, Wilson's new classification recognises two distinct lineages as worthy of separation at genus level. One lineage is comprised only of *Eriostemon australasius* and *E. banksii*, and the other include the remaining species traditionally placed in *Eriostemon*, as well as members of the genus *Philotheca.* The assignment of names to these genera followed the rules of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature.

The formal name changes have been published in the botanical journals Nuytsia (Paul Wilson) and Muelleria (Michael Bayly). These changes are a positive step towards a more natural classification of the Australian Rutaceae but, as our knowledge of relationships continues to improve, and as is the way with plant taxonomy, I dare say they will not be the last!

Waiting for Wollemi

also from australian plants online
(http://farrer.riv.csu.edu.au/ASGAP/APOL13mar99-7.html)

Again, this article is quite old but might still be of interest to some members...

If you're one of the many people who would like a plant of *Wollemia nobilis* (the Wollemi Pine) you might have to wait longer than expected. It was originally anticipated that plants

may become available to the general public during 1999, but a newspaper report in the Sydney Morning Herald suggest that the plants will probably start appearing in garden Centres in 2004-2005 at around $20 each.
The article above (which I saw first in September 2000) suggests that the only plant that can be viewed growing in the ground is still the 'imprisoned' specimen at the Sydney Botanical Garden which Rod Orr photographed and which was pictured on the front cover of the September 1998 *Whirrakee*. I wonder how big it is now?

On the topic of newly discovered plant species.....the Nightcap Oak
(from Gumnuts No 31, December 2000).

Late last year another 'living fossil' was discovered. This plant species, a member of the family Proteaceae, has been named Nightcap Oak (after the Nightcap Ranges in north-eastern NSW where it was discovered) is apparently closely related to the Bartle Frere Oak (*Eidothea zoexylocarya*) from North Queensland, this latter species being very rare also and only having been formally named in 1995. The new plant also provides a link with the discovery of a fossilised seed near Ballarat in the 1870s which was recorded by Baron Ferdinand von Mueller as being between 15 - 20 million years old.
Dr Pewter Weston of Sydney's Royal Botanical Gardens believe that the Nightcap Oak also belongs to the genus *Eidothea*. This suggests that these trees flourished along the east coast when the climate was much cooler but are now restricted to isolated habitats where conditions have remained suitable for their growth.

Editors' Note: this 'living fossil' did not raise nearly as much excitement as the Wollemi Pine, even though its relatives date back to many million years ago. It is another extraordinary find nevertheless...Perhaps now, more than ever, people are becoming aware that there may be many many unknown species out there, large and small, which may help explain the origins of our flora and fauna.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Speaker Syllabus for General Meetings 2001– Second Wednesday 8:00 pm

Please check each **WHIRRAKEE** for additional events or changes. If a workshop is planned, it will start at 7:00pm. The speaker will be introduced at 8:00 pm.

Date - 2001	Topic	Speaker
14 March	**Barking Owls**	**Paul Peake**
11 April	**Urban and Suburban Frogs in the Melbourne Region**	**Dr Kirsten Parris**
9 May	**The World's Most Successful and Smallest Crustaceans**	**John Neil**, LaTrobe University (Bendigo)
5 June	**WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY - SPECIAL PUBLIC LECTURE**	
13 June	**Implementing a Landscape Approach to Conservation Management in the Goldfields Bioregion**	**Robert Price**, Manager, Flora and Fauna North West Region, DNRE (Bendigo)
11 July	**Pollen Flora of the Box-Ironbark Forest**	**Katherine Legge and Sabine Wilkens**, LaTrobe University (Bendigo)
8 August	**Managing a Saline Environment: the Success of the Loddon-Murray Community's Irrigation Salinity Management Plans**	**Steve Lottkowitz**, DNRE Bendigo
12 September	***Annual General Meeting***	
10 October	**Wildlife Shelters and Wildlife Rescue**	**Garry Cheers, Wildlife Rescue and Information Network Inc.**
14 November	**The Landscape Approach to Biodiversity**	**Geoff Park**, North Central Catchment Management Authority
12 December	**Christmas Dinner** At the Hall, Bring Salad, Casserole or Desert. Come early, to sit down at 6:30, and visit with friends for as long as you like.	

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Mammal Survey Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meeting..... **please note: new Format**

Wednesday, March 14

7:00pm: Workshop on identifying grasses
If you are interested in grasses, come along to our first workshop, either as a teacher (if you know something about grasses) or as a student (if you want to know more about grasses). In addition to the workshop, tables with reading material are set up for those present early but not participating in the workshop.

8:00pm: Dr Paul Peake will talk about Barking Owls.

After the speaker, we shall conclude with reports and observations. Minutes will not be read any more, nor will they be taken. However, notes will be made of club members' observations.
This new format will be trialled over the next few months. All comments welcome.

Mammal Study Group
Ring Maurie Lewis for details on any of these excursions: 0407427179

Each Friday a group of enthusiasts are putting up nesting boxes in Spring Gully's Mandurang area. Meet at 16 Vains Street 9am
(to 12.00 noon).

The Mammal Study group is planning a day trip on **Saturday, March 17** to Torrumbarry Weir to put up six nest boxes for squirrel gliders.
There is a hotplate for cooking and free billy tea! BYO food, chair etc.
Meet at clubrooms at 7am or meet at the car park at the weir between 10 and 10.30am.
Please ring Maurie Lewis the night before to confirm attendance or if it is raining.

There are many other trips planned for the rest of the year.....please see page 3 in this issue.
e.g. Wednesday, March 28, Bat counting at Lake Weeroona (see page 10 for details).

Sunday, March 25

Highway Clean-up, 10am -12noon
(at the Seven Sister section of the Midland Highway, Huntly).
Bring gloves (if you have any) and your good spirit.

Supper
The usual arrangements for supper are as follows: members either bring a plate or pay $1 for supper. This small amount is used to reimburse members who purchase essential supper supplies.

Other Events

Friday, March 9, 8pm
Castlemaine Uniting Church Hall,
Littleton Street
Bird Atlas Meeting with Andrew Silcocks

For details, contact: Margaret Badminton on 5473 4555.

March 2001 VFNCA Campout
Rawson-Central Gippsland, 9-12 March
see October 2000 Whirrakee for details and contacts. There will be quite a contigent from Bendigo. In the past, members have always been very enthusiastic about these campouts.
If you are interested, it is not too late to arrange attendance...

Bendigo Native Plant Group
On **Friday 20 April**, the speaker at the group's monthly meeting will be Michael Marmach, whose topic will be **"The Canning Stock Route"**.
This will be a long program and will be presented in two sessions:

Session 1: 6:15pm
Break for evening meal
Session 2: 8:00pm

Michael is well known as a first rate photorgapher and speaker. Members of BFNC are cordially invited.
Meetings of the Bendigo Native Plant Group are held at the BFNC Clubrooms.